

Instructional design in an ideal world would be a simple matter of identifying learners' needs and goals and then creating some learning materials that enabled them to meet those goals. Such a statement presupposes that some theory exists to guide instructional designers in that process. What is the theory?

***Behavioural approach**

:Gagné (1968) who stressed that the aim of instructional design was to create the particular conditions needed for a particular type of learning. Under this behavioural approach, he described, for example, the conditions that a student needed for learning things such as rules, concepts and problem-solving.

***Cognitive approach**

:: Emphasises design based on characteristics of individual learners.

***Constructivist approach**

::Emphasises the learner's own activities as the mechanism for learning (Elen and Clarebout, 2001).

Although many writers today espouse the constructivist approach as the only one to use, any cursory perusal of ODL materials shows that instructional designers regularly make use of all three approaches. Some constructivist writers also acknowledge that other theories have their place:

We believe that the initial knowledge acquisition phase is better served by instructional techniques that are based upon classical instructional design techniques. Classical instructional design is predicated upon predetermined learning outcomes, constrained and sequential instructional interactions, and criterion-referenced evaluation. (Jonassen et al., 1993)

This judgement would seem to be supported by the practice of instructional designers.